

Rep. Lesia Liss (District 28) - Rebecca Havens written testimony

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To: <lesialiss@house.mi.gov>
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Subject: Rebecca Havens written testimony

Please add this to your website. My name is Rebecca Havens, I am Lori Aldape's daughter. Thank you!

I would like to take this time to thank all of you for allowing me this opportunity to speak. My name is Rebecca Havens and I am adopted.

I am not bitter or angry about my adoption. My parents gave me a comfortable life, a sister and tons of love and support. I lacked nothing except for who I was, where I came from, what made me *me* and my ethnic and medical history.

Being adopted brings many challenges in life. The lack of any physical resemblances, that mirror image that any non adoptee takes for granted is only part of the larger question, "*who am I?*" I'd like to share a story that had a huge impact on my life. A direct side effect of my adoption that I can't understand why exists.

On my 35th birthday, my then 5 year old son Jace started displaying some very strange facial tics. His eyes rolled back into his head, his jaw cocked over the to right leaving his mouth gaped open. His head jerked violently to the back and right almost bringing his chin to his shoulder. These were NOT normal movements. Our family doctor instructed us to the emergency room for a battery of tests including an emergency CAT scan of his brain.

The neurologist's reaction to my incomplete medical history at the follow up appointment was more embarrassing and frustrating than any other set of circumstances I have lived so far as an adoptee without records. The doctors reaction to the hole in my background was anger and panic. The urgency in his voice was frightening. My information was incomplete because Michigan is a sealed state. I am not entitled to this pertinent piece of myself.

The entire time my son wiped my tears and apologized. He was apologizing for something neither he or I had any control over. This incident lead to an all out search for my missing genetic roots.

I first tried to find my biological parents when I was 14, with the help of my adoptive parents. We were told to come back when I was 18. So I waited.

At 18 I tried again. I applied to the adoption central registry hoping my biological mother did the same, and I waited.

Over the next few years I inquired several times, the answer was always the same "no, nothing yet. Be patient"

So I waited.

I waited for 10 years. Ten YEARS lost because no one could be bothered to walk to the basement to look in the archives for my file.

Several years after my reunion with my biological mother, which happened without the aid of the central registry, I went to my County Courthouse for a copy of my original birth certificate. I was told that ALL paperwork pre-adoption is destroyed after finalization. I was told Lutheran Social Services had burned down and all records were destroyed. I was threatened with arrest when I stated that I knew none of what I was told was true. I knew this because I once had a copy of my original birth certificate and all pre adoption papers. I had my mother's signature. Unfortunately, it was stolen from me along with my amended birth certificate.

Last year I came to Lansing to replace my Amended Birth Certificate. On the form it asked if the applicant is adopted. If so, you must supply your "name at birth".

I asked the clerk what would happen if I didn't know that information. He very matter of factly responded "then I can't help you". I was expected to have the name off my original birth certificate, that the state sealed away when I was 6 weeks old in order to get a new amended certificate.

The frustration and humiliation from being jockeyed around from one person to the next with no clear cut answers or explanations is in itself at times debilitating, not to mention expensive.

The day I found my biological mother the earth didn't shake, there was no catastrophic back lash on anyone. No one else felt a thing, but my world had truly changed, and the people who knew me best, my family and friends noticed. They saw a change in me, a peace that never existed before. I was finally on the path to self discovery, self respect and acceptance. Reuniting with my biological parents has been the best gift I have ever given myself. It wasn't about my parents downfalls or mistakes. It was about me and who I was supposed to be.

With time, they realized that.

I am not a second hand citizen. I and any family members born to me, deserve the same rights as any non adoptee.

My sons medical condition has been put on observation for now. He has had a few flare ups since the original onset, but I now have a FULL medical background to give the doctors if it ever happens again. I owe that to my biological mother. She got that for me.

I obtained my medical history without my sealed information, without permission from my parents, without a court order. None of which I had the time or financial means to wait for.

I am in reunion with both my biological mother and father. I still view my adopted parents as my parents, they will always be my Mom and Dad. I'd like to be able to answer the questions of how much I weighed, and how long I was, what time I was born, but instead I have to explain why I'm not entitled to this information.

All my parents respect one another and are friendly toward each another. We have a BBQ once a year. I have two half brothers, two more grand mothers, whom I've met. Cousins I'm friends with on face book, aunts and uncles.

I'm here today with my biological mother, Lori Aldape, to tell you I know who I am and to ask why, when I nor my children have done anything wrong, why we can not have the same rights as those who are not adopted. Why my ancestry and heritage, my medical history are viewed as a privilege when to non adoptees its a right?

I have listened to Evan B. Donaldson's recent testimony before the New Jersey committee via Adam Pertman, and I couldn't agree with him more. This isn't just about medical information. It's about shaping positive identities in adoptees. Medical information is something people that don't understand can wrap their head around. Again, why, why should my life, my children's lives, be dictated by a handful of citizens that don't feel it is necessary enough for me to have just because they don't understand. I assume they have their ancestry, their medical background, their mirror image around them everyday. They have not had to imagine who they look like, what Grandpa died from or any other things that lay at their finger tips. If diabetes or breast cancer ran in your family wouldn't you want to know?

I have listened to the opposition over time say that if one woman gets hurt by this unsealing of records it is too many. But what of the millions of adoptees and their offspring that are hurt everyday by keeping the records sealed? One woman who

no one knows, can't put a face to, we are not sure is even still alive, is protected because she has a right to her privacy. I have more privacy than I can tolerate.

To me that means all medical technology advances do not apply to me and my family. Years of research paid for with tax dollars, my tax dollars, my children's tax dollars, still unavailable to us because no insurance company is going to pay for all the pre testing to find out what is wrong with us in order to use all this technology to make us better. We will live forever in the poor house trying to pay off our medical bills while others have all the latest technology at their feet.

My heart goes out to the woman that want no contact, but the fact is, they gave birth to a child. They may not parent us but they brought us into this world. We don't disappear or remain children that need forever protection. New laws and changes in societal policies always affect someone. Adam Pertman stated in his testimony that the results of their studies are lopsided. "Hard lopsided" in favor of birthmother contact. Do we as a nation not go with what is best for the masses? One birthmother is important, but what of the generations that come from her relinquished child? Are none of us worthy of the same passionate convictions?

I ask you as a mother, daughter, sister, adoptee to push bills HB4006 and HB4015 to a vote. I am not a faceless piece of paper. I am not an eternal child yearning for protection. My children are not any less important in this world because of the choices my biological parents made. I may be the product of poor planning by two people, but that does not make me any less of a human.

I thank all of you again for your time and consideration.